

# Brookhaven Preserves Hobbs Farm in Centereach

posted on 5/8/2009 8:57:06 AM

**CENTEREACH, NY** - Brookhaven Town Supervisor Mark Lesko, Deputy Supervisor/Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh and Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld today announced the preservation of Hobbs Farm, one of the last remaining working farms in the Centereach area. Brookhaven Town formally closed on the Purchase of Development Rights for Hobbs Farm on Thursday, April 16, purchasing the development rights for the 7.64-acre farm from the Bethel AME Church of Setauket for \$681,000.

"This property is a perfect example of why land preservation programs are important in Brookhaven," said Supervisor Mark Lesko. "Hobbs Farm is a historically significant property, owned by one of the few African-American farmers in Brookhaven Town, and the only farm left in Centereach. Now, this land will forever remain farmland, and thanks to the volunteers Friends of Hobbs Farm and the tireless efforts of Councilwoman Walsh and Councilman Fiore-Rosenfeld, this is once again a working farm at the heart of this community."

"Hobbs Farm is the last remaining piece of farmland in an area that was once surrounded by hundreds of acres of active agricultural use. Preserving this part of our heritage was important to so many people in the community, who have volunteered countless hours to make this a working farm once again," said Councilwoman Walsh, who has pursued preservation of the farm since she was first elected to the Town Board.

Located at Stony Brook Road and Oxhead Road in Centereach, the 7.64-acre parcel belonged to Alfred Hobbs, and was one of the few farms in the area owned by an African-American family. Upon Hobbs' death more than a decade ago, he willed the property to the Bethel AME Church of Setauket. This PDR project involved the purchase of development rights of approximately 7.64 acres of the Centereach farmland. Two of the six lots comprising the farm were excluded from purchase - where a house exists on one lot, and another wanting to be kept by the owner for a potential future residence.

The James Hobbs family came to Long Island from Georgia in 1906 and grew farm produce in New Village (North Centereach) for Long Islanders for three generations, first as farm workers and later purchasing the land for Hobbs Farm. James' son, Alfred Hobbs, took ownership in 1955 and farmed his own property as well as rental farmland in the surrounding area for many years. He passed up many opportunities to sell the property, hoping that it would remain a farm. When Mr. Hobbs passed away in the late 1990's, he left the farm property to the Bethel AME Church in Setauket where he was a member. Legal complications caused a delay in transfer and led to a time when the farm was vandalized and fell into disrepair.

"Today, we can celebrate the realization of Alfred Hobbs' dream. While so much of the surrounding community has been developed from rural farmland into housing for our families, Alfred Hobbs' land will always be a farm - feeding those in need in the community, thanks to the volunteers of the Friends of Hobbs farm," said Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld.

To support Bethel AME Church, Friends of Hobbs Farm was formed in 2007. The restoration process began in 2007, with renovating the farmhouse and barn, starting a two-acre cooperative gardening project providing produce to several local food ministries, and developing some community activities on site. The Friends of Hobbs Farm, which works to provide fresh, wholesome, local produce to the needy through a network of local food pantries and food programs, and raises public awareness about hunger and food production through both formal and informal educational programs targeting local youth and adult residents.

"The Friends of Hobbs Farm is working to maintain a remnant of the agrarian legacy of this area by preserving the last farm in the Middle Country community, and helping to foster a sense of community pride by hosting public events in partnership with civic and educational organizations in the area," said Tom Lyon of Friends of Hobbs Farm. "We are also able to provide opportunities for spiritual growth through the farm's accessibility to local churches and similar groups. We want to thank Councilwoman Walsh and the Town Board for their efforts to preserve the farm, and make the dream of having this property forever remain farmland a reality."

Lyon added that the Friends of Hobbs Farm will hold their second Spring Festival this Saturday, May 9, from 12-5 p.m. at the farm. For more information, go to the farm's website at [www.hobbsfarm.info](http://www.hobbsfarm.info)

"Brookhaven's decision to preserve Hobbs Farm through the purchase of development rights is an excellent use of this preservation tool that has been used across Suffolk County to keep viable agricultural lands operated by current or future generations of farmers. Keeping Long Islanders in the business of farming will preserve our rural heritage forever," said Joseph M. Gergela III, Executive Director of the Long Island Farm Bureau.

Brookhaven placed the property on the Town's Open Space Acquisition priority list in 2004. Last year, Councilwoman Walsh introduced the resolution to purchase the farm's development rights with funds from the Clean Water Open Space Bond Act of 2004, ensuring that it would forever remain farmland. The resolution was unanimously approved.

A number of community organizations, including the Centereach Civic Association, Bethel AME's Friends of the Farm, the Middle Country Coalition for Smart Growth, and Sustainable Long Island have worked to breathe life back into the farm. Through donations of time, money and materials from many individuals and local businesses, volunteers restored the farm buildings on the property, cleared overgrown acreage, planted two acres of land, and are reaping harvests that help stock local food pantries.

Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh (speaking) is joined by Supervisor Mark Lesko, Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld, Councilwoman Jane Bonner, LI Farm Bureau Executive Director Joseph Gergela III, Pastor Gregory Leonard and children from the Oxhead Elementary School at Hobbs Farm.

**Division of Public Information \* Office of the Town Council**

One Independence Hill • Farmingville • NY 11738 • Phone (631) 451-6595 • Fax (631) 451-6258